

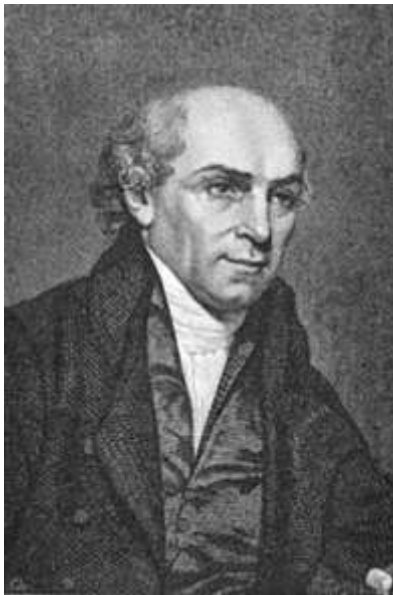
William Carey's "An Enquiry"

By Bill Moberly

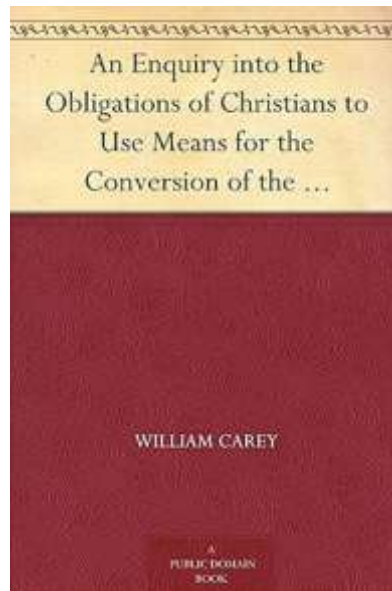
From the Editor, November 2025

Carey's Challenge

Recently, I spoke at a mission conference in Iowa with this theme:
"William Carey's 'An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians' to Reach the Nations Still Resonates Today."



William Carey, circa 1887



The full title of this 50-page pamphlet is a little awkward today:
An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens.

Published in May 1792, Carey certainly uses some outdated language, but the heart of his challenge is rooted in God's HEART FOR and CALL TO the nations!

Why did he write "An Enquiry"? A few years earlier as a young 28-year-old pastor, Carey wrestled with the Great Commission. He concluded (as one author wrote), it "would be a good idea to use some, well, you know, some means. As in, do something. Go over there, do some preaching. Use some means."

When Carey made an argument like that in a gathering of ministers, one elderly member is said to have interrupted him with the reproach: “Young man, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he’ll do it without consulting you or me.” ¹

¹ Carey's Enquiry, May 12, 1792 - The Scriptorium Daily

Rooted in Scripture

What Carey covered was reasoned and clear, covering topics that are still a relevant part of God’s Call to the nations. ²

It was rooted in Scripture, beginning with the Biblical Basis of Missions! He summarized past global missionary efforts, as well as the current state of the world. The final two sections focused on “Practicability of Something being done, more than what is done” to reach the lost, and “Duty of Christians in general, and what means ought to be used, in order to promote this work”.

² *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*

God Ignited a Passion for World Missions

What happened? God by His Spirit truly ignited a passion for answering His call to the nations: The number of mission societies formed in the 40 years preceding 1792 was zero. But 31 mission societies formed in the 40 years following 1792. ³

³ A Protestant Mission Era Began with the Sudden Appearance of more than 30 Mission Societies (6th of 9). [Robert Blincoe]

If you extend the window further, there are far more mission societies. The ‘use of Means’ by small mission societies that formed with a vision to reach specific groups among ‘the nations’ has continued through today by the grace of God! The work today of CGM is a one more response to the challenge to “use means.”

There was once a time when, though sometimes a bit behind our evangelical brothers and sisters, Lutherans also looked to facts like this to motivate sending. The reality of vast numbers of unreached peoples was often the key factor in where to send missionaries across the predecessor church bodies that eventually formed the ELCA.

Until the ideological shift that began in the 1960’s and gained momentum over the next few decades, during the previous 75 years more Lutheran

missionaries were sent to China and India than anywhere else by a wide margin! Given the cultural and humanitarian focus of Lutheran missionary deployment by Lutheran denominations the last generation or two, these facts may be surprising.

On the other hand, World Mission Prayer League ([WMPL](#)), like other independent Lutheran mission agencies for example, has never wavered from its commitment to reach the Lost with the Gospel.

God Continues to Ignite a Passion for Missions!

THE MOST CHALLENGING OPPORTUNITIES

Frontier People Groups

Discover the 5,055 frontier people groups where fewer than 1 in 1,000 families follow Christ. These are the most challenging places where pioneer work isn't just needed—it's essential for reaching the 2 Billion people who live with the least access to the gospel.



ALWM Team leader in clandestine "noodles and Gospel" sharing over lunch with non-believers in a communist country



Entire class of Hindu Children in Sunday School in Bangladesh

The same simple, persuasive argument presented by William Carey in our day can, by the working of the Holy Spirit through contemporary voices speaking to open ears and soft hearts, ignite a fresh wave of faithfulness and fruitfulness in response to God's call to the nations! CGM exists to echo these truths and strategies as we share the stories here issue by issue.

Elderly Muslim man interested in the Gospel and the sure and certain hope of Heaven in Bangladesh with ALWM team leader (Bangladesh is under .2% Christian)



"Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"

— Matthew 9:37-38



Rev. Bill Moberly, director of Awakening Lives to World Missions (ALWM), helps churches with global mission outreach. He authored *Igniting a Passion for Missions: A Guide for Church Leaders*. He and wife Sally have 7 children, 21 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren. They have traveled to 23 countries to share the Gospel and equip leaders. Contact Bill at: pastorbill@alwm.org

Links:

William Carey: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Carey>

Pamphlet: <https://scriptoriumdaily.com/careys-enquiry-may-12-1792/>

An Enquiry: <https://www.chapellibrary.org/pdf/books/enqu.pdf>

Protestant Mission Era: <https://robertblincoe.blog/the-protestant-mission-ice-age-explained-in-eight-timelines-sixth-of-ten/>

CGM: <https://www.cgmmag.com/>

ELCA: <https://www.elca.org/>

WMPL: <https://wmpl.org/>